

A
LETTER
TO A
GENTLEMAN,
IN
ANSWER

To a late Book, Entitled,
*A Discourse concerning the Period of
Humane Life.*



L O N D O N,
Printed, and are to be sold by *Enoch Wyer* at the *White-
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ST. JOHN'S

1870

to the Hon. Secy of the Navy
Washington D.C.

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Very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,

A Letter to a Gentleman, in Answer to a late Book, Entituled, A Discourse concerning the Period of Humane Life.

Honoured Sir,



Although my unwillingness to engage in the nice and dark Speculations of Controversial Divinity, has made me the less acquainted with them; yet your earnest desire has prevailed with me, to survey that Discourse you were pleased to send. Not that I think it a piece of wisdom to search into things that are Mysterious and secret: For I am fully perswaded that in such kind of debates, silence is the best and safest method; but because such Controversies when unskilfully handled, may be of bad consequence; it is surely then a necessary duty to clear the Truth from the undue imputations cast upon it. And because I humbly conceive, that the Author of that Book, Entituled, *A Discourse concerning the Period of Humane Life*, has fallen upon very bad Principles, and maintained a Position contrary both to the Doctrine of our Church, and of all sober and Orthodox Divines, it will not therefore be lost labour to examine that Discourse, especially since such bad Books are too suitable to the humours of men in this age; and shall we let it pass abroad to infect men, without ever discovering the danger of it? shall the disease spread, and yet no antidote be prescribed against it?

no sure, we maintain too good a cause to let it be ruined by our negligence and silence.

Committing then this undertaking to the Divine Providence, I shall first endeavour to state the question aright, that we may not contend about words, and then I shall lay down that Principle which is most consonant to Scripture and Reason.

The Question then under debate, is not whether the Period of Humane Life be mutable or immutable? for the Author and I may maintain both, and yet differ in our opinions; but the great Controversie is, *Whether the Period of Humane Life be unalterably fixed by the Divine Decree?* This the Author plainly denies, and this Truth I shall endeavour to prove by undeniable arguments, and then more particularly examine the Author's Discourse.

And first, Are there not many plain Texts of Scripture which positively assert that the days of men are determined by the Divine Decree? Consult the Sacred Oracles, and ye shall find this Truth sufficiently confirmed; how many Phrases of Scripture do upon this account express a kind of propriety, that men may claim in this last period? Sometimes it is called, *his time*, because of its certainty. *Eccles. 9. 12. Man also knoweth not his time.* The period of his life is fixed by the Divine Decree, and therefore he may call it *his time*, although he be ignorant when it shall come. The Royal Psalmist calleth it *his end*, *Psal. 39. 5, Lord make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days.* As if he had said, I know, O Lord, that thou hast measured my time, and fixed the end or period of my life. The like Phrases are frequently scattered up and down in the Scripture, all which denote, that the period of every mans life is immutably fixed by the Divine Appointment,

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which

which made holy *Job* take up this pious resolution, *All the days of my appointed time I will wait till my change come.*

The Truth of this may also appear from the determination of those things to which Scripture does aptly compare the life of man ; how frequently is man compared to grafs, whose flourishing and decaying is fixed and determined, the Sacred Text resembles its extreams to the morning and evening : upon which account ye will also find those extreams appropriated to the life of man, *Pfal.* 90. Sometimes the life of man is compared to a *Race*, *Heb.* 12.1. Now in every race the mark is fixed, and the bounds and limits determined. And to be short, how oft is mans life compared to a *shadow*, *Pfal.* 144. *2 Cor.* 29.15. But a shadow, however it dependeth upon the motion and position of the Sun, yet you know both its length and brevity have their appointed bounds. I know arguments taken from similitudes, are frequently fallacious ; but I have studied to press them no further than the scope of the comparison leads me.

But passing many Texts of Scripture which may be urged in defence of this opinion, I shall only mention some plain instances which confirm this opinion. As first, that noted place in *Job*, *Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass, &c.* *Job* 14. 5. This is so clear a Text, that I could not but admire the Author's impudence in pitching upon it, so as to make it the basis of his Discourse. 'Tis true he endeavours to give an answer to it, but alas how unsatisfactory and silly ! for pag. 81, he tells us, *That every mans life is enclosed within a certain number of years ;* and this he thinks is the genuine sense of *Job's* words : but who can be so stupid as to fancy that this is their meaning? Doth not the

Text

Text clearly hold forth, that the bounds of mans life are determined and appointed, and that he cannot pass that period which the Divine Decree hath prefixed. Either the Author must say, that that certain number of years is determined, or not ; if it be not determined, then let him again consider this Text which asserts it ; if they be determined, why is he so angry with those who maintain the determination of the period of Humane Life. If the Author pleaseth I shall draw *Job's* words in this Syllogistick frame, If God has so determined mans days, that he cannot pass those prefixed bounds, then the period of Humane life is not mutable ; but the first is unquestionable, therefore the last. But 2^{ly}, he answers pag. 110. *That which satisfieth me is this, that Job hence only says that our days are determined, but he speaks nothing how they are determined.* I answer 'tis true, *Job* does not tell us how the days of man are determined, but yet he acquaints us that God has appointed these bounds. 2^{ly}, He tells us that man cannot pass the bounds thus prefixed, which upon the matter is equivalent to what we affirm, viz. that God hath made the period of Human life immutable. But now let us examine in what sense the Author thinks the period of Human life is determined, pag. 81. *The period of every particular man's life is determined in respect of the Divine Prescience ; and this he thinks is the meaning of Job's words, The number of his months is with thee.* Answer. I am heartily glad that the Author acknowledges the infinity of the Divine Knowledg, but sorry that he should reject that sure foundation upon which we can only infer the certainty of it. That God does certainly know the period of every mans life, is a truth agreeable to the principles of natural and revealed Religion ; but how this knowledg can be any more than conjectural if not founded on the decree, is a

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Paradox I could never yet resolve: but this comes afterwards to be considered.

Another plain Text to confirm this is, *Psal. 90. 3, Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest return ye children of men.* Which place plainly affirms that men depend upon the Divine appointment, and that their returning to the dust is the result of his Eternal Decree. Another Text equivalent to this is, *Psal. 68. 20, Unto God the Lord belong the issues from death.* That is, the period of every mans life is in the hand of God; which is to say with the Apostle, *In him we live, move, and have our being.* Nay, the Lord himself hath attested this truth, *Dent. 31. 39, I kill, and I make alive, I wound, and I heal, neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.* I shall only add another Text, and then proceed; the place is, *Act. 17. 26, He giveth to all life and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all Nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.* From which place it appears that the Author of our Natures, is also the supream Governour of our lives; and that he hath not only determined how long, but also when and where we shall live.

2ly, We may argue from the determined event of those who are exposed to a violent and casual death, and from all those Predictions in Scripture concerning the death of particular persons. Do you think that the period of those who die a natural death is more mutable, than of those who die violently? reason would plead that if the period of any mans life be mutable, then surely of those who die a violent and casual death; but that the period of those mens lives who are exposed to a casual or violent death is fixed and determined, may sufficiently

sufficiently appear from the following instances: the deaths of *Hophni* and *Phinehas* are fixed, 2 *Sam.* 2. 34. *In one day they shall die both of them.* Here the determination foretold, and yet *Chap.* 4. we may read that their deaths were both casual and violent in respect of second causes. The Prophet *Elijah* does particularly describe the manner of *Jezebel's* death, and the place where it should be. *And the Dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezebel, and there shall be none to bury her,* 2 *King.* 9. 10. But the most considerable instance is that of our Lord Christ, *Dan.* 9. 26. *And after threescore and two years shall the Messiah be cut off.* *Act.* 4. 27, 28. *Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.* To these and such-like instances the Author answers pag. III, *We never doubted but the great Governour of the World, may make what reserved cases he pleases from the general rule, and the ordinary course of things.* Now, now, we have the Author yielding and succumbing; for what reason is there that the period of some mens lives are determined more than others? let him produce his reasons, & *erit mihi magnus Apollo.*

Let us consider the most casual death recorded in Scripture, and we shall find it to be determined and fixed; there seems nothing more accidental and casual than the death of him who killeth his neighbour ignorantly, and yet view *Exod.* 21. 13, and ye will see that both the time and manner did depend upon the Divine Decree. There are many Predictions in Scripture concerning the periods of persons lives, see *Dent.* 32. 50. *Numb.* 14. 23. 2 *Sam.* 12. 14, &c. and shall we dream that the Divine foreknowledg is builded upon any other basis, than the Divine Decree appointing to every man his proper bounds?

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I might here further add that since the first step and moment of our beings is determined, it is but reasonable to think that the last is also fixed: If the Conception and Birth of man does depend upon the Divine appointment, what repugnancy is it to say that his death does also depend upon it? but the first is plain from *Pf.* 139. 16. *In thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there were none of them.* The Birth and Conception of *Isaac*, Gen. 21. 1, 2; of *Samson*, Judg. 13. 3, 5; of the *Shunamite's* Son, 2 *King.* 4. 17; of *John*, Luk. 2. 13, &c. were all particularly foretold, which implies that they were fixed and determined.

What! are not all the actions and works, all the ways and steps of man ordered and determined? and shall only the period of Human life remain mutable and uncertain? It is long since the Wise-man told us, *That mans goings are of the Lord*, Prov. 20. 24. Nay the whole History of Scripture informs us, that the works, ways, and breath of men is in the hand of God, *Dan.* 5. 23. *Eccles.* 9. 1. *Aff.* 17. 28. Now according to the Scripture-Phrase, that is said to be in the hand of God, which falleth under his Counsel and Will. See *Aff.* 4. 28.

All other Animate Beings are determined, the falling of the least Sparrow to the ground is ordered by infinite wisdom; the *Psalmist* in his Contemplation of the Works of God brings in all the Creatures waiting and depending upon their Maker, ascribing the taking away of their breath to him who upholds all Creatures in their Beings; *Thou hidest thy face they are troubled, thou takest away their breath they die, and return to their dust*, *Psal.* 104. 29. I make mention of this to let you see how unreasonable it is to plead for the mutability of the period of Human life, since the Beings of the more ignoble Creatures are fixed.

Nay indeed Inanimate Creatures are also limited and concluded within prefixed periods ; *Thou hast* (saith the Psalmist) *set a bound to the waters that they may not pass over*, Psal. 104. 9. Every thing hath its determined season, the Sun, Moon and Stars, observe their appointed motions : And is the Divine Decree exercised about such inconsiderable Beings, and yet not at all concerned with the period of Human life.

Do we not also read of the determined period of Kings and Kingdoms, of Churches and Families ? the driving out of the *Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Amorites* and *Jebusites*, before the Children of *Israel*, was determined to be done *without fail*. That the Kingdom should not continue with *Saul*, and that Ten Tribes should be taken from *Rehoboam* ; that the Children of *Jehu* should sit upon the Throne of *Israel*, only unto the fourth Generation ; all these were surely determined, and according to the Predictions fulfilled. The Prophecies of *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel*, and especially of *Daniel*, furnish an abundance of Instances to confirm this. *Babylon*, who made the Earth to tremble, and the Kingdoms thereof to shake, who vainly boasted of exalting her Throne above the Stars, and of being lifted up above the Clouds, had her period of abasement established, by a purpose which maugre all opposition behoved to stand. *Nebuchadnezzar's* converse with the Beasts, and his eating grass with the Oxen, was confirmed by a more irrevocable statute, than any of the *Medes* and *Persians*, and all was accomplished ; *That he might know that the most High ruleth in the Kingdom of men, and doth according to his will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth ; and that none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What dost thou ?* The Captivity of Gods People in the literal *Babylon* was determined, and (according

ing to the number of the years foretold) particularly fulfilled. And it is sure, that all the days of the Churches groaning under the pressures of Mystical *Babylon*, are also dated ; for although the *Revelation* be a *Book sealed*, which none except the *Lion of the Tribe of Judah* can open and read ; yet the Visions will at the set-time speak. The conjectures of men may be fabulous and erroneous, but the sayings of that Book are all faithful and true, for God revealeth to his Servants what is certainly future.

It is a dangerous thing to grant that the most inconsiderable and contemptible thing is excluded from the hand of Divine Providence : men may think it a small business to deny that God hath fixed the period of Human life, but I assure you the business does not stand at this, but a wound is given to the whole System of Divine Providence ; I wish sad experience did not confirm this truth.

Do not all these necessary things which sustain the life of man, depend upon the Divine appointment ? The World is not governed by a general, but by a special and particular Providence ; and man, who is the Epitome of the Universe, is guided and directed, is furnished and provided by his supream Lord and Maker ; without whose particular communications and dispensations, he behoved to return quickly to his mother *Dust*. The *Psalmist* upon this account brings in all the Creatures depending upon God, *Psal.* 204. 27, *These wait all upon thee that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.* And our blessed Master, while correcting the groundless jealousy and misbelief of his Disciples, confirmeth this truth, *Mat.* 6. 26, 31, &c. *Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your Heavenly father feedeth them.*—Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eat ? or what shall

shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? for your Heavenly father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. So that the Apostle had reason to conclude, *Act. 17. 28, In him we live, and move, and have our being.* It is upon this ground that all the encourageing precepts of casting our care, and all concernments upon him, are bottomed; and shall we think that all these things depend upon the Divine appointment, and yet the period of man's life which depends upon them be excluded?

'Tis an old and unquestionable maxime of Philosophers, *Cujusque contradictionis altera pars determinatè vera est, altera falsa*; so that from Eternity it was true, that *Saul* should die in such a place, and at such a time; or he should not die in such a place, and at such a time. One of the two Enunciations was certainly true, for a contradiction admits no mean, and so by consequence, the period of every man's life being amongst the number of things future, it must be certainly determined.

I confess I do not understand from whence the life and death of man doth depend, if not upon the Divine Decree: Will ye have your recourse to a Stoical fate, or *Turkish* necessity? will ye plead from the fortuitous concurrence of *Epicurean* Atoms? or from the Mechanical motion of the *Cartesians*? will ye run to the Astronomical influence of the Stars? or to the *Paracelsian* fancy of the Soul of the World? Pray, Sir, are not these things more like *Bedlam*-fancies, than the sober Sentiments of profound sophies?

What? doth the life of man so depend upon meat and drink, and the wise government and moderation of our sensual appetites, that it should be longer extended if these things were observed? is there any infallible

Pill or potable Gold, that can perpetuate our Beings ? have we not seen the vanity of such pretensions, since that Poet hath concluded more rationally, who tells us,

Longius aut citius mors sua quemque manet ?

Will ye with doating *Averroes* say, That God only regards the *Species* of things? or with others, That small circumstances are unworthy of his care ? Will ye with *Dicrandus* maintain, that when God first created man he gave him vertue and strength to act, which he constantly upholds, but does not concern himself any further ? do you not know how badly these opinions are characterized in the Scholes?

But I come now to the main thing I intend to urge, and it is, If God has not by an absolute Decree determined the period of every man's life, how can the certainty of the Divine foreknowledg be defended ? The Author denies the *Dominican* fiction of the real Presentiality of things in Eternity, a conceit only builded upon that fabulous notion of *Boetius*, Eternity is an indivisible instant, all at once.

Our Author seems here to be exceedingly perplexed, like a Ship tossed with a great storm, he knows not what Haven to take ; for a long time he conceals his opinion, but at length he hath his recourse to the Jesuitical port, *God knows* (says he) *whatsoever is true, because his cognisance is infinite ; wherefore it is unreasonable to think that God could not have a perfect comprehension of things if he had not decreed them absolutely.* Page 114.

And thus the Divine Decree is made conditional, and subsequent to his foreknowledg ; for instance, God does therefore decree the period of *Ahab's* life to be at *Ramoth-Gilead*, because he did foresee that *Ahab* should be seduced

seduced by false Prophets to go up, and that he should be killed there.

But alas ! what a huddle of insignificant expressions are these, and a meer darkening of speech by words without knowledg ? Here notable conclusions are inferred from the *basis* of meer possibilities, and the unworthy tendency of the whole, is an advancing the possible creature in its *may be* operations above God ; *Who* (as Sacred Writings inform us) *doth all things according to the counsel of his own will* ; the Creature is now made Sovereign and Director, and according to its nodd, God must frame his Decrees.

I intend not to insist in the refutation of this fancy, commonly known by its name of *Scientia media*, since so many Learned men have already examined it, both accurately and successfully ; yet because 'tis the great stumbling stone and the *Diana* so many adore, I shall not altogether pass it over with silence.

'Tis not worth the pains to examine who was Parent of this Bastard, you know the *origo* of illegitimate children is frequently obscure. I know both *Fonseca* and *Molina* are ambitious contenders for it, but that is not material. Sure if this dumb child could speak, its first articulate accents should be in the words of *Job*, *Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, there is a monster conceived ; why died I not from the womb ? &c.*

As for its Name briefly consider, that in the Scholes they frequently speak of a twofold knowledg in God ; one *Natural*, which they usually call *Scientia simplicis intelligentie* ; and they inform us that by this God knows all possible things ; the other they call *free*, or as they are pleased to phrase it, *Scientia visionis* ; whereby God knoweth things future, by viewing his Decree : betwixt these

these two the Jesuits place their *Scientia media*, because they suppose it participates of both extremes ; at other times they call it *conditional*, because it properly hath a reference to those things which should be *future*, if the conditions upon which they depend were placed.

But intending only a glance at this rugged Theme, I shall omit things less material, and only in a word or two manifest the unconceivableness of this Position. First, since antecedently to the Decree men with all the imagined circumstances of time, place, propensions to passion, maladies, remedies, &c. are meer *non-entities*, and purely possible, how can these things and *modes* be considered as conditionally future ? this were in effect to make God know things otherwise than they are in themselves. That the Divine knowledg is infinite, and cannot but know whatsoever is knowable is unquestionable; but since things purely possible are neither absolutely nor conditionally future, how can it consist with the infinite perfection of the Divine knowledg to know such things to be conditionally future ?

But secondly, Supposing there were some things conditionally future, yet what method shall be taken for maintaining and vindicating the infinite perfection of the Divine knowledg ? since all knowledg depending upon conditions is first suspended, and secondly conjectural ; for instance, *Ahab's* being perswaded by the false Prophets to go up to *Ramoth-Gilead* was a thing altogether uncertain, for the perswasions of those Prophets might not have been, they might have dissuaded as well as have advised him to go ; and supposing they used inducing motives and arguments, yet *Ahab* might have rejected them ; for according to their Principles, *Positis omnibus ad agendum requisitis potest voluntas agere vel non agere*. The connexion between those conditions and the thing

thing not being necessary, it can never be infallibly certain, and consequently the Divine knowledg is made to be conjectural, because depending upon conditions which may either be or not be.

Thirdly, There is nothing conditionally future in respect of God: for either the condition is to be placed, and so it becomes absolutely future; or else the condition is never to be placed, and so it remains amongst the number of possible Beings: and thus every thing which is the object of the Divine knowledg is either future or not future, if it be future it comes to pass only because it is decreed; for whatever is the cause of existence is also the cause of futurition, but all grant that the Divine Decree is the cause of things; if God had never decreed or willed, there should be a World, there had been no World. 'Tis true, some things depend as to their Existence upon the fulfilling of preordained conditions, as the preservation of *Nineve* upon their Repentance; but since that condition was as absolutely decreed as their preservation, every thing future does depend upon an absolute Decree: if the Object be not future, it is either placed amongst things purely possible, and to place things in such a state, no Decree is requisite; or it is placed amongst things which are intrinsically repugnant to Existence, such as the two parts of a Contradiction to be both true; and here no Decree is requisite.

There be two Texts of Scripture which the Author urgeth in defence of this opinion, the first is, *1 Sam.* 23. 11, 12. God certainly knew (saith he) that if *David* had not departed from *Keilah*, they should have delivered him into the hands of *Saul*, pag. 115. *Answ.* It is evident that *David* was not curiously inquisitive concerning the Divine Will, for that was a secret which did not

not belong to him to know, but the thing *David* desired to know was, whether the *Keilites* intended to deliver him up, and whether *Saul* would come to *Keilah*: so that either first there was no Prediction of any thing which should be ; or secondly, the Prediction was not concerning *David's* being delivered up, but concerning the inclinations of the people to deliver up. I need not insist here, since you know it is an usual thing to infer the futuration of the thing from the propensions of second causes. A second Argument he urges from 2 *King*. 13. 19. *Pag.* 115. *It is as evident* (says he) *as any thing can be, that God foreknew that Joash should have smitten Syria till he had consumed it, if Joash had but smitten upon the ground five or six times.* *Answ.* It is altogether groundless to imagine that the Lord had decreed that *Joash* should smite the ground more than thrice ; nay the event makes it unquestionable, that the number of the strokes and the victories were stated, and equally included in the Decree ; and yet the Prophet might have been rationally offended with *Joash*, because he smote not oftner ; for what do we know but the Revelation he had was general, *viz.* that *Joash* should smite the *Syrians* as oft as he smote upon the ground with the Arrows ?

From all this it may appear, that the Period of Human life is therefore immutable because decreed, and that the certainty of the Divine knowledg can be only built upon the sure basis of an absolute Decree. This is the Doctrine of all sober Divines, as may be seen in their Debates with the Jesuits about the Doctrine of Providence.

I confess it is not in my power to reconcile the Author with himself, for *Pag.* 112, *We have no ground,* (says he) *to think that God decrees every future action.* And yet

Pag. 113, He grants that the most contingent actions depend immediately upon the Divine Will. Is the Divine Decree any other thing than the Divine Will, and if contingent actions depend upon the one, how are they excluded from depending upon the other ?

Having thus established my own opinion, I come in the next place to examine what the Author objects. And first, *If the period (says he) of Humane life were fatally determined, then those wretched miscreants who with their own hands put a period to their lives, may easily excuse themselves before their Judge, is there any resisting of the Divine Decree ?* *Answ.* The Divine concurrence about sinful actions is a very thorny and intricate case, but yet the Author might have remembered that in the Schooles they speak of a twofold Decree, the one effective whereby God decrees whatsoever is good ; the other permissive, whereby he has decreed to permit such sinful actions ; God does not force or compell men to sin. As the Apostle *James* informs us, *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.* But he wisely permits such criminal actions, neither is the Divine Providence sleeping when men commit them.

2ly, He Objects, *That this opinion is hugely inconsistent with the liberty of mans will in the choice of the means,* *Pag. 103.* *Answ.* That the Divine Decree concerning the immutability of the Period of Humane life does no way clash with the use of the means ; comes afterwards to be considered: that it does also very well agree with the freedom of Human nature is plain, because the Divine Decree does not hinder men from acting freely, but rather facilitates and helps men in their free choice. 'Tis true God is the first cause of every action, and he decrees that things should be ; but he has not decreed to force

force or necessitate man to act so, and so. And then it would be further considered, that all kinds of necessity are not inconsistent with liberty, neither doth it belong to the nature and essence of human freedom to be the supream orderer of its own actions; Glorified Saints who are determined to will what is good, are yet every whit as free agents as ever; and those damned souls who are concluded within the circle of wickedness, yet still retain that innate principle of freedom, otherwise they should be no more men.

It is granted by all ingenuous men, that only an internal necessitating or external co-acting and compelling principle, offering violence to the Will, and forcing it to act, does abolish the freedom thereof; but now all that we plead for is a determination of events, which implieth indeed their infallibility, but no contraining of the Will. The reconciling of the contingency of actions with the Divine Providence is indeed a very intricate speculation, and the moderate on all sides plead for a cessation, from an enquiry after such mysterious and occult cases. It is enough that we know that man is a free agent, and that nothing can come to pass without a precedent Decree; but how to explain all difficulties, and reconcile these two, *hic labor, hoc opus*. Many have attempted a resolution of this doubt, but alas it may be yet said that this is a deep mystery, referred to *Elias* time; I shall rather admire than search out the depths of Providence; O the altitude and unperceivable excellency of the Divine Wisdom, comprehending infinite millions of incomprehensible ways of working with the human will, without hurting or prejudging it in its liberty.

3ly, He objects, *That this opinion leaves no place for praise to the learned Physician, nor for dispraise to the unskilful Emperick, since they are both acted by an external*

force. *Ans.* I have already shewed that any kind of necessity that can be inferred from the Divine appointment is not irresistable, but infallible, not intrinsick and absolute, but hypothetick and extrinsical, which doth not force the Will, but helps and corroborates it in its operations. 2ly, Although the Divine Decree cannot be altered, yet the skilful Physician deserveth praise because what he prescribes is both according to art, and without any compulsion or force: the Decree is an imminent act, which doth not destroy the freedom of Human nature. I doubt not but the Period contained in the Decree is immutable, and that all the Medicaments of the World cannot lengthen mans life one moment beyond what is determined; and yet we must not deny Physicians that honour they justly deserve, for they act as freely as if there were no determination in the case, and in doing their duty they deserve praise. And as for the unskilful Emperick sure no man can doubt that he is blameworthy, since he prescribes those things he knows not. The skilful Physician is the instrumental cause of our safety, though not the supream and principal.

4ly, He objects, *Pag. 106, The natural and genuine consequence of this Doctrine, is, to make men like fools or madmen expose themselves to any danger.* *Ans.* This is just like that Argument which Satan propounds to our Lord Christ, *Mat. 4. 6, If thou be the Son of God cast thy self (being then upon a Pinnacle of the Temple) down, for it is written, He shall give his Angels charge concerning thee.* Pray, Sir, did ever any considering man think that the secret Determinations of the Divine Counsel are our rule? have we not most excellent precepts and commands, whereby we may know our duty? and can we from these take any encouragement to expose our selves to danger? do you think it did any whit excuse Judas strangling of him-
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himself, that it was foretold and decreed to be permitted?

And thus I have briefly dispatched those Arguments, whereby the Author endeavours to prove that the Period of Humane life is not determined by any secret unconditional Decree: before I proceed to examine these Arguments, which he brings to prove the mutability of the Period of Human life, I shall first vindicate the opinion I defend from an unjust imputation the Author frequently casts upon it; *viz.* That this is only the opinion of the *Stoicks*, dressed up in better apparel, *Pag.* 78. And hence he often by way of contempt calls the Divine Determinations and Decrees fatal and dormant. It is long since *Augustine* desired such men to correct their language; since the Divine Decree introduceth no fatal necessity, but leaves the Will free. But as the word *Fate* is hateful in all Christian Scholes, so the Stoical interpretation of it is rejected; for according to the *Stoicks* the Supreme Being is not exempted from the Decrees of Fate, but inevitably tyed to that eternal order and series of Causes.

It was the folly and unhappiness of the *Stoicks* to run upon this dangerous rock, while they endeavoured to shun the *Epicurean* madness, who ascribed every thing to the government of blind Fortune; but sure this unworthy and impious fancy has no affinity with the opinion I have been proving. If you please I shall briefly shew the difference between the two first: the *Stoicks* maintained that the first being was not exempted from the Laws of fate, and that he could not hinder the futuration of things; *Quod fore paratum est summum illud exsuperat Jovem.* 'Tis true they grant that he hath established this order and series of causes, but they also contend that he must always obey the Decrees of fate:

Hence,

Hence the Poet Lucan boldly affirms,

Lucretius

*Finxit in æternum causas, quæ cuncta coercent,
Se quoque lege tenens.*

By which means the Divine liberty and Omnipotency are everted and quite destroyed. But according to our opinion the Divine Counsel is made the first cause of things, but still he is the supream orderer of all things, and is not tyed to any order of causes. 'Tis true he hath made a Law which cannot pass, what he hath willed to be must certainly come to pass; and the reason is, because he is an unchangeable God.

2ly, The *Stoicks* defended that there was a natural order of causes established from eternity, by reason of which all effects were necessarily produced; but we acknowledged no such natural nor eternal order of Causes from which all things proceed: 'tis to the eternal Decree of God, we have our recourse; from hence we maintain the dependency of things, and the futurity of all actions. But as some Beings act freely, and others necessarily; so from eternity he decreed that there should be such a difference amongst agents, and by vertue of this Primitive appointment the contingency of free agents is established and confirmed.

The Ancients did exceedingly reverence Fate; nay, so superstitiously mad were some of them, that they did dedicate Churches to the God of Fate, and rendered thanks for recovery from sickness to it: and if death did put an untimely period to their Beings, this solaced them that Fate had ordered it, and there was no shunning of it; hence that ground of comfort which one of that number gave to his friends.

Parce

*Parce precor tristes questus effundere, vixi,
Nec erat in fatis longior hora meis.*

Having thus cleared the huge difference that is betwixt the Stoical Fate and the Divine Providence which all good Christians maintain, I come now to view those Arguments the Author makes use of to prove the mutability of the period of Human life.

First, *Upon the observance* (says he) *of the Divine Laws, there are many promises in Scripture assuring us of length of days; and on the other side, there are many threatnings of cutting short the days of the wicked, Pag. 118.* *Ans.* The explicate promises of prolonging, and threatnings of cutting short the days of men, do not in the least establish and confirm the mutability of the Period of Human life; for in Sacred writ the words *to prolong or shorten*, do not properly signifie to make longer or shorter than the dated Period; only they are taken Analogically, implying length or shortness of days, as the Apostle explains it, *Ephes. 6. 3, Children obey your Parents in the Lord, —that you may live long upon the earth;* and not that they might live longer than God had from eternity decreed.

And although the thing promised, namely *length of days*, doth depend upon the fulfilling of the condition; yet the Divine Decree doth not, since the condition is included in the Divine appointment: and thus if men obey the Divine precepts they may expect long life, because God has from eternity decreed it. And indeed the promising of long life upon the observance of the Divine statutes is very suitable to the Wisdom and Goodness of God, for hereby God deals with men as Parents use to deal with their sick Children; they promise them
many

many things, rather to encourage them to take the bitter Potion prescribed to them, than out of a real intention to bestow such things.

Neither indeed is it unworthy to be noted, that those who observe the Commands of God, who walk regularly and exactly, and conform their ways to the Laws of Heaven, shall have length of days added to them, and shall die (as it is said of *Abraham*) in a good old age. Now it is certain, that *Abraham* lived not so long as any of his Predecessors, and yet he died in a good old age, because he was a good man. Upon this account the Prophet *Isaiah* tells us, *That the child shall die an hundred years old, but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed, Chap. 65. 20.* It matters not how long, but how well we live; for if we live well we shall enter into those everlasting Mansions where we shall live for ever.

And as for the wicked who are said not to live out half their days, this is not to be understood absolutely, and in respect of the Divine Decree; but first, because the date of their lives might have been longer according to the ordinary course of nature. 2ly, Because their hopes, expectations and desires are frustrated; they promised themselves probably many years, as the rich man in the Gospel did, and now their expectations are disappointed on a sudden, when death summons them to depart.

That Religion forbids all manner of excess which impairs our bodily health, is very true: but I see no ground for the Author's alledging, *If we consult experience, we shall find these to be the men who ordinarily enjoy the longest lives,* Pag. 120. Sure if we consult experience we shall find that observation of the Wiseman, *Eccles. 7. 15,* to hold true, *There is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness.* It were an easie matter to produce a multi-

multitude of instances to confirm this, but it is needless to enlarge.

But notwithstanding of this the many promises of long life to those that obey the Divine Precepts are not vain and useles, for hereby men are encouraged to live conform to the Laws of Heaven ; and in doing so, if the Promise be not accomplished here, they shall enjoy that which is better ; for what can be more desirable than to be removed from the miseries of this vain life, and to be recompensed with an endless enjoyment of unexpressible joy and bliss ?

Alas ! how little to be regarded is the long life of the wicked ! *Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet it shall not be well with the wicked, Eccles. 8. 12.* Their long life only helps to augment their misery, and to make their fall more lamentable and great.

2. *Another argument (says he) to confirm our assertion, may be taken from the pious and devout prayers of the righteous, and their turning from their sins by an hearty repentance, both which conduce to the lengthning out of their days. But if the Period of every mans life were fatally determined, our prayers should be very needles, for can we be so senseless as to imagine that our prayers can move God to change his unalterable statutes and decrees,* pag. 123, 125.

Ans. This is but a miserable consequence illegally deduced, and very far contrary to all rules of art ; for although the Divine statutes be irrepealable, yet this does not exclude the use of Prayer, which is included in the Decree ; neither doth the infallibility of the event deprive men from the obligation of duty. Will ye urge it as a vain and frivolous thing, that the anointed of God should ask *the heathen for his inheritance, and the utmost ends of the earth for a possession ?* Because it was decreed,

ver. 7. Or will you quarrel with our Saviours praying, *That the cup might pass from him*, because he certainly knew that for that end he came into the world? Was the greatly beloved *Daniel* a fool in praying, *That the Lords anger against the people of Israel might be removed*, because he perfectly understood the number of the years which were to be accomplished in the desolations of *Jerusalem*? *Dan.* 9. 2, 16. Was it a fained madness in *David* to fast and pray for the recovery of the child, since *Nathan* had assured them it should die? *2 Sam.* 12. 14, 16. Or because the Kingdom of God will certainly come, must the perfect pattern of Prayer want that Petition, *Thy Kingdom come*. It were easie to multiply many such like instances, but these few may serve to shew the weakness of this way of arguing.

There be three or four places of Scripture he brings to confirm the efficacy of Prayer and Repentance in prolonging the lives of men, which I shall briefly dispatch, and then proceed to his third argument. The first Text is *Jonah* 3. 10, *Of repenting Nineve* (says he) *we read that God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not.*

Ans. First in the general we willingly grant the efficacy of Prayer and Repentance, but we deny that they move God to change his Decrees; and thus more particularly, although God repented (a phrase spoken after the manner of men) of the evil he had threatened, because *Nineve* repented; yet from the out-goings of Eternity, it was decreed that *Nineve* should meet with such a conditional threatening. It was concluded that they should repent, and that their repentance should prevent the threatened judgment, and so there is no change in the Divine Will: neither prayer nor re-
pentance

penitance can move God to alter his Statutes.

And although God sometimes threatens those judgments he never intends to inflict, yet in doing so he does not dissemble with men, for such threatenings only imply that the nature of the crime deserves to be punished with the judgment threatened; for instance, *yet forty days and Nineve shall be destroyed*: the meaning is, O *Nineve*, thou hast committed most hainous and hateful sins, thy transgressions are so exceedingly provoking that they justly deserve that thou shouldst be destroyed.

A second Instance he urgeth is *Hezekiah's* recovery; fifteen years being added to his life after the Lord had peremptorily told him, he must *die and not live*; hence he concludes that there could be no absolute Decree since his prayers and tears prolonged his life, *Pag. 124. Ans.* I know very well that those who press this example judg it as unanswerable as any Mathematical Demonstration; but truly if it be rightly understood, it does not in the least prove what they intend. For first, we must distinguish betwixt the threatnings and decrees of God: the threatnings only inform us of our duty, and the desert of the crimes committed, but the decree contains the secret will of God concerning the events of things, in which all conditions and circumstances of persons and of time are included; as in the present case, *Hezekiah's* tears and prayer for deliverance with the antecedent threatening were all equally included in the Decree. 2^{ly}, We must distinguish between a Commination absolute and conditional; an absolute Commination is sometimes purely absolute without any condition tacitely implied; sometimes only absolutely proposed, but conditionally understood: now the threatening, *Thou shalt surely die and not live*, was of the nature of this last; it was seemingly absolute, but really conditional. So that

the denunciation of death was a conditional Commination absolutely propounded, inducing *Hezekiah* to repentance, and having no respect to the absolute Decree, which prefixeth unpassable bounds to men.

There are two dangerous opinions we must by all means avoid ; first, some men impiously conclude that it favors of too much dissimulation to threaten one thing and to intend another. This is an horrid Position, for *God is not as man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should dissemble* : the intent of the Divine threatenings is to stir up men to their duty. 2^{ly}, Others infer the mutability of Gods Will, and an opposition betwixt his threatenings and decrees ; but the common distinction in the Schools is of force enough to ruin this plea. It is one thing (say they) for God to change his Will, and another thing to will the mutation of things: the Divine Will is always unchangeable ; *With him is no variableness nor shadow of turning*, Jam. i. 17. But the things may be changed, because God from Eternity willed the alteration of things ; for instance, he from Eternity decreed that *Isaiah* should deliver such a message to *Hezekiah*, he decreed the tears and prayers of *Hezekiah*, and the addition of fifteen years ; all these were chained together in the Decree.

There is then no dissimulation at all, no opposition betwixt the threatening and decree ; for God did not will that *Hezekiah* should die when he threatned him, only he willed that there should be such a threatening. I shall explain this by a clear and unquestionable instance ; God did command that *Abraham* should offer up his Son *Isaac*, but he did not will nor intend that he should do it. So in the present case God did threaten *Hezekiah* with death, and yet he did not intend that he should die. But I proceed.

3^{ly}, We

3ly, We must distinguish between the conjectural certainty of death, inferred from the fatal events which frequently accompany dangerous diseases, and the infallible certainty of death, inferred from the Decree: in respect of the first, *Hezekiah's* death might have been said to be certain, for the disease seems to have been very dangerous, and in the judgment of men incurable; now you know 'tis ordinary for Physicians to say a Disease is mortal, when it is accompanied with deadly symptoms.

In Sacred writ there are several Instances where persons are said to be (as it is written of *Hezekiah*, 2 *Chron.* 32. 24.) *sick to the death*, in respect of the malignity and dangerousness of the disease, who yet have had their lives prolonged till the prefixed period. Thus *Elihu* tells us of those who being *chastened with pain upon their bed drew near to the grave*, Job 33. 19, 22, and yet were delivered from going down to the pit, ver. 24. And the *Psalmist* informs us of his being brought back from the grave, *Psal.* 30. 3, and of his being delivered from death, *Psal.* 56. 13.

Another Instance to prove the efficacy of repentance, he urgeth from *Jer.* 18. 7, 8, &c. *Ans.* That both prayer and repentance are efficacious we never denied, but we contend that they are therefore useful because they are means appointed by God, and conditions included in the Decree, and not that they can prolong our lives one moment beyond the period prefixed in the Decree.

A third Argument (says he) to prove that our lives may be extended or shortened, may be taken from the use of Medicaments, *Page* 127. *Ans.* The opinion we defend does not condemn the use of Medicaments; only it implies, that it is a precarious principle to separate the means from the end, since the Divine Decree is of both. Would it have been judged an act of prudence in *Abraham* to have

have omitted the fatherly care of his Son *Isaac*, because God had told him, *That in Isaac shall thy seed be called* ? or because our Gracious Heavenly Father hath commanded his people to cast their care upon him, should they therefore be regardless of themselves ? If you had such a grant as *Hizekiab* had, that fifteen years should be yet added to your life, would ye live *Cameleon-like* upon the air ? If all these inferences be unreasonable, why do ye urge the usefulness of Medicaments, because the event is unalterably determined ? Sure if men must make use of the means, even after there is made an intimation of the event, it is every whit as reasonable to make use of the means where the event is lockt up in secret.

It was a pertinent answer that *Origen* gave to *Celsus*, who made use of such an Argument as this, *Si fato* (says he) *decretum est ut liberos tollas, sive uxorem ducas sive non ducas liberos procreabis; sed si in fato est ut liberos non suscipias, sive ducas uxorem, sive non ducas, non procreabis liberos; sive igitur tibi fatale est ut procrees vel non procrees liberos, frustra cum uxore des liberis operam. Quemadmodum enim, quia non possunt sine congressu cum uxore procreari liberi, non frustra uxor ducitur; ita quia ex morbo relevari ager sine ope medicinae non potest, necesse est medicum adhibere & falsum est* *μὴ τὸν εὐδαίμωνος ἔστιν ἰατρεῖν*; a clear Instance to show the folly of separating the end from the means. 'Tis a fabulous conceit to think that God Decrees the end without any consideration of the means; for although the Decree which is an eternal and immanent action does not depend upon the means; yet the event does, and both event and means are included in the same Decree, and at once ordained.

By all this it may appear that Medicaments are not to be rejected, and that the skilful Physician is no redundant

dant member in a Kingdom, but a person dignified with an honourable employment. And although the Divine Decree hath set bounds to men, saying, *Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further*; yet the Physician may be lawfully employed; for he must not curiously enquire into the Decree, which is hid, he must consider what is his duty: although the Ministers of the Gospel know that the increase of spiritual blessings depends neither upon *Paul* nor *Apollo*, yet they must not omit to plant and water.

4ly, He objects, *Nothing is more evident than that there are several things which have a physical efficacy in the shortning of mens lives, as all kinds of excejs.—And on the other side there are many things which effectually conduce to the lengthning of our days, namely all kind of moderation and temperance, &c.* Pag. 131. *Ans.* I have already shewed that an absolute Decree does not exclude the use of lawful means; all that I shall now add is this, that although God be the chief and principal cause of things, yet he does not hinder second causes from acting according to that power he hath implanted in them. We don't doubt but there are many things which conduce both to the prolonging and shortning of our life, but these things are all ordained and included in the Decree, for God does not decree the period of mans life without a consideration of all circumstances; and thus we don't deny but Intemperance is the cause why many men have been exposed to an untimely death, but God did foresee this, and he decreed to permit it.

The last Argument he makes use of is, *Don't we evidently perceive that many men had lived longer if they had not wretchedly and unreasonably exposed themselves to danger?* Pag. 132. *Ans.* That mens exposing of themselves to danger has been the cause of some mens short lives,

we

we willingly grant ; but that their exposing of themselves to that danger was not included in the Decree, this we peremptorily deny. It is a great mistake to conclude that we should not be solicitous of our selves, because our days are determined : the Author grants that in some extraordinary cases some mens days are determined, and yet I hope he will not say that those men ought to expose themselves to needless danger. Although our great Master had his time appointed, yet he carefully avoided and fled from the assaults of his enemies. Although *Hezekiah* did know that fifteen years should be added to his life, yet he was not so foolish as to cast himself upon dangers ; and how frequently had the Children of *Israel* promises of subduing their enemies, and yet they did not abstain from their Warlike preparations and politick stratagems.

And now I have considered all that is considerable in that Discourse, I leave you to judge, whether what I have written may be of publick use. You have engaged me in an intricate case, and now let me engage you to meditate upon the subject under debate. It is far more advantageous to live as those who know that a Period shall be quickly put to their beings, than to dispute of it accurately and learnedly. Let us not be solicitous how long we shall live, but how well ; it is the ordering of our conversation aright, that is the principal part of wisdom, and in doing this we will find more satisfaction than in searching into hid Mysteries. *And unto man he said, behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding, Job 28. 28.*

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